DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 252 334 RC 015 064

AUTHOR Moriarty, Thomas E.
TITLE State Educational Policies and the Mission of Rural Community Schools.
PUB DATE Oct 84
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Northern Rocky Mountain Educational Research Association Meeting (2nd, Jackson Hole, WY, October 4-6, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Certification; *Community Schools; Comparative Analysis; Curriculum; Educational Finance; *Educational Objectives; Elementary Secondary Education; *Local Issues; *Policy Formation; Pupil Personnel Services; Rural Areas; *Rural Schools; Small Schools; State Departments of Education; *State School District Relationship; Superintendents
IDENTIFIERS Colorado; Kansas; Missouri; Montana; Nebraska; North Dakota; South Dakota; *United States (Great Plains)

ABSTRACT

Any conclusions that community education concepts are "alive and well" were not supported in a study of the impact of state education policies on rural school districts with total enrollments of 350 students or less in the Great Plains Region (Kansas, Nebraska, Missouri, Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota). Survey instruments were mailed to 742 district chief school officers and 595 (80.4%) were returned. Respondents were randomly placed in five groups and responded to separate survey instruments. Eighteen to 21 policy options were listed in each of five areas: curriculum materials and development, pupil personnel services, resource generation and allocation, goal development and organizational structure, and personnel training and certification. In each of the five categories the impact of state educational policy options was perceived as negative. State policymakers were perceived as unable or unwilling to accept small rural schools as having individuality--an attitude which is counterproductive to the concepts of community education. Dealing with rural issues would require policymakers to initiate reforms to close the gap between current practices and local community expectations. The "one best system" concept is outmoded in state policy frameworks and new models should be developed to capitalize on strengths of each rural community and to provide for congruence of missions and outcomes. (BRR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

7,3

ED252334

STATE EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AND THE MISSION OF RURAL COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Thomas E. Moriarty
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

by

Thomas E. Moriarty
Professor of Educational Administration
School of Education
University of South Dakota
Vermillion, South Dakota

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

Presented at

Northern Rocky Mountain
Educational Research Association

October, 1984

RC015064

STATE EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AND THE MISSION OF RURAL COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Introduction

The avowed purposes of state education policies is to strengthen educational opportunities through accountability processes. Policy is operationalized as regulations or improvement criteria in the form of accrediting procedures and funding formulas. These procedures and formulas are intended to provide guidance, direction, and support to school districts in an effort to assure the integrity of each district's mission.

Problem Statement

Rural people, in lieu of accepting these avowed purposes, are voicing major complaints about the ever increasing educational mandates that must be carried out in their districts as prescribed by state level policy makers. Their concern is that state educational policies as implemented actually hinder the mission of small and rural schools. In an effort to assess these conditions, the objective of this study was to investigate the impact of state level education policies upon small and rural schools in the Great Plains Region of the United States. The study included school districts with total enrollments of 350 students or less in Kansas, Nebraska, Missouri, Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota. The superintendents of schools were selected as the respondents. Patterson's American Education served as the source for identifying school districts.

Research Procedures

The conceptual model for assessing state level educational policies dealt with the mechanisms designed to control accreditation and state funding. These mechanisms were classified into five categories, namely: (1) goal development and organizational structure; (2) revenue generation and allocation; (3) curriculum materials and development; (4) personnel training and certification; and (5) pupil personnel services. In essence, these five categories represented a taxonomy for analyzing state policies.

For purposes of collecting the data, five survey instruments were developed. Table 1 sets forth survey areas and the number of options included in each. Each instrument represented one of the control mechanisms and contained selected policy options. The policy options were taken from: (1) stated or implied policy positions in state legislative statutes or documents developed by state boards or state departments of education dealing with accreditation or financing; and (2) documents dealing with community education, effective schools research, and national reports dealing with conditions of today's educational systems.

The chief school officers for the districts included in the study were randomly placed into five groups. Each group served as a resource pool to respond to one of the survey instruments. Respondents were requested to rate each policy option included in their survey instrument on a six-point scale - positive or negative. Ratings were to be based upon the extent to which respondents perceived the policy options as either enhancing or hindering local districts in reaching for and establishing their own mission.

TABLE 1

SURVEY INSTRUMENTS AND NUMBER OF POLICY OPTIONS

Survey Instruments		Policy Options
Q1	Curriculum Materials and Development	20
Q2	Pupil Personnel Services	20
Q3	Resource Generation and Allocation	21
Q4	Goal Development and Organizational Structure	18
Q5	Personnel Training and Certification	20

Respondents were asked to consider policy options as positive to the degree that they: (1) assisted local districts to articulate their own mission; (2) enhance decision making at the local level; (3) support the concept of local initiatives and diversity; and (4) emphasize broadly conceived performance criteria.

Respondents were asked to consider policy options as negative to the degree that they: (1) imply the same set of objectives for all school systems; (2) establish a single set of criteria for the entire state system; and (3) foster the notion of regulations and formulas to achieve excellence.

As reflected in Table 2, Overall Distribution and Return of Survey Instruments by States, 742 survey instruments were mailed and 595 were returned or 80.4%. Survey instruments were mailed to each respondent with a cover letter setting forth instruments for completing the survey and a self-addressed postage paid return envelope. Survey instruments

TABLE 2

OVERALL DISTRIBUTION AND RETURN OF
SURVEY INSTRUMENTS BY STATE

State	Total N	Q1		Q2		Q3		Q4		Q5	
		M	R	M	R	M	R	M	R	M	R
Colorado	67	14	13	14	12	13	12	13	10	13	12
Kansas	73	14	10	14	11	15	11	15	13	15	13
Missouri	100	20	15	20	17	20	17	20	17	20	16
Montana	102	21	12	21	15	20	12	20	17	20	12
Nebraska	165	33	28	33	26	33	26	33	27	33	29
North Dakota	132	26	21	26	23	26	18	27	20	27	22
South Dakota	[illegible]	21	19	21	18	21	20	20	17	20	14
TOTALS	742	149	118	149	122	148	116	148	121	148	118
Return	80.4		80%		82%		79%		81%		80%

were numbered for purposes of follow-up. Following the initial mailing, a follow-up post card was mailed one week after the initial mailing. This procedure was followed two additional times.

Data Analysis

Rankings assigned to each policy option by respondents were tabulated in each of the survey categories. Responses from the seven states included in the study were combined for purposes of analysis. Table 3 identifies the survey categories and the total returns for each one.

The mean rating for each item was determined. These means were then averaged. The outcomes of this process are included in Table 3.

TABLE 3

DISTRIBUTION, RETURN, AND MEAN RATINGS OF SURVEY INSTRUMENTS BY THE FINE CLASSIFICATIONS EMPLOYED (Q1-Q5)

Survey Instruments	Total N	Total Return	% Return	Mean Rating
Q1 Curriculum Materials and Development	149	118	.80	3.49
Q2 Pupil Personnel Services	149	122	.81	3.48
Q3 Resource Generation and Allocation	148	116	.79	3.7
Q4 Goal Development and Organizational Structure	148	121	.81	3.5
Q5 Personnel Training and Certification	148	118	.80	3.4

Findings

In each of the five categories, the impact of state educational policy options as perceived by respondents from the seven states included in the study was negative. The negative features of the policy options was related to the belief that state policies: (1) imply the same set of objectives for all state school systems; (2) establish a single set of criteria for the entire state system; and (3) foster the nation of regulations and formulas to achieve excellence. The negative rankings on the six point scale empoyed ranged from 3.4 to 3.7.

Areas	Ranking
Curriculum Materials and Development	3.49
Pupil Personnel Services	3.48
Resource Generation and Allocation	3.7
Goal Development and Organizational Structure	3.5
Personnel Training and Certification	3.4

The general nature of policy items considered negatively by the respondents were related to either the unwillingness or inability of state policy makers:

*to integrate policies at the state level dealing with the five categories of policy development which included goal development and organizational structure, curriculum development and materials, pupil personnel services, personnel training and certification, and resource generation and allocation.

*to assist school districts at the local level in comprehensive long range planning which deals with needs, philosophy and goals, programs, services, evaluation and costs in relation to the communities economy, cultural priorities and commonality of purpose.

*to accept rural communities as different from urban communities by supporting alternative models suited to community needs and resources.

*to accept the concept of rural school communities as catalysts for community economic planning.

*to assure citizen input and decision making in planning and evaluation of outcomes.

*to promote evaluation of policies in terms of either performance or other judgements of success or failure of a practice.

*to provide services which are geared toward assisting school districts to develop school-community goals rather than perform regulatory functions with services directed toward achieving state level prescriptions rather than local initiatives.

Discussion

Any conclusions that community education concepts are "alive and well" in the Great Plains Region are not supported by the data. The failure of state policy-makers to integrate all categories of policy development in addressing the state systems of education provides a foundation for making existing policies dysfunctional for all school districts. This fact coupled with the inability or unwillingness of state policy makers to accept small rural schools as having an individuality of their own is counterproductive in dealing with the concepts of

community education. In essence these deficiencies produce a condition as well as a climate that does not allow rural districts to consider alternative mechanisms through which community education goals can be effectively pursued. This lack of any clearly defined conceptual framework for policy development which addresses the total educational, social, cultural, recreational and economic needs of the community results in the futility of state educational policies as mechanisms for educational development in rural communities.

To describe state systems as obsolete in terms of the contemporary needs of small and rural school districts would miss the point, because such a conclusion would not deal with the core of the problem. What is needed is a dynamic force to deal with educational policy decisions which lie ahead and grow out of: (1) new requirements of equity and equality; (2) the changing basis for public interest in education; (3) concerns for good environments for growing up; (4) non-traditional modes of study; (5) lifelong learning and career education; (6) the redefined essentials of education, and (7) accountability features of effective schools. A consideration of these new forces would cause policy makers in education to be more sensitive to public demands.

Dealing with the rural issues of our times would require that policy makers initiate reforms which would close the gap between current practices and local community expectations. Newer models of community education must emerge which accept the reality of community differences, nourish and sustain local identities, emphasize outcomes more than processes, and stress leadership and long range management plans at the local level. Of necessity, such reform would need to be based upon diagnostic models which support these concepts rather than regulate them. In such an arena,

policy development would deal with unique educational issues and problems at the grass-roots level where the stakeholders reside.

Addressing educational reform at the community level should result in looking at policy development as a dynamic force for educational development. However, to do so would require the devolvement of the current "one state system" concept of our current industrial models.

The devolvement of the current system and the thrust of policy development is not an advocacy for the elimination of system and order in education, but rather to develop more sensitive and sophisticated models which accept the pluralistic traditions of the market place. Models of this nature can not be incorporated in the existing policy frameworks simply by tinkering with it.

The new thrust of state policy makers and state agencies should be to provide leadership by providing expert assistance and creative service to local systems in helping them to solve local or regional problems, to initiate new programs, to establish complicated relationships with a variety of agencies and interests, and to develop their sophistication in strategies of constructive change. Of key importance is helping communities in the area of self evaluation processes such as establishing quality standards and evaluation techniques for local use and monitoring these practices in relation to quality standards.

The existing policy framework for establishing state educational systems was developed nearly a century ago in response to the challenges and circumstances of the times. Although it has been altered, adjusted, and revised by tinkering with curriculum and materials, organizational structure, pupil services, preparation and certification of teachers, and school financing, the fundamental historical concept of the "one

best system" for the state has been maintained. Even now, as states are adopting a variety of policy initiatives, generally they are narrowly conceived and related only to some form of student or teacher assessment. In the context of existing state policy frameworks, these new initiatives lack clarity as to expected outcomes. This is further evidence current policy frameworks need to be replaced with newer models that view educational development as having a dynamic intellectual unity which allows for experimentation with different organizational and delivery modes as well as newer models of accountability. In this context, models could capitalize on the strengths of each rural community and provide for an organizational fit between local initiatives and plans which results in congruence of missions and outcomes.